

## **Shoppers, businesses should take extra care during holidays**

The Bluffton Police Department is happy to partner with Crossroads Community Support Services in the "Helping Hands" project. The purpose of the project is to help identify families that are at risk of falling into greater need both legally and socioeconomically in our community.

By helping identify and offering them assistance through Crossroads Community Support Services, we hope to help these families solve the challenges they face. This also allows officers to improve the relationships between the department and community and have a greater role than just enforcing laws.

Many families are facing economic and legal challenges that may place them at greater risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. A loss of a job, a health issue, problems with substance abuse or family issues often lead to greater problems if some form of intervention does not occur. Families in this situation may not know where to turn for assistance or feel uncomfortable in asking for assistance. This project is directed toward families that need a hand up, not a hand out. By helping families avoid becoming involved in the criminal justice system we help the families and improve the quality of life in our community.

### **These are the goals that we hope to achieve:**

- Create an atmosphere of trust with the Bluffton Police Department.
- Provide a means for officers to reach into the community at a supportive instead of enforcement level.
- Provide an avenue of communication for Crossroads Community Support Services to provide a holistic approach to address the at risk family.
- Involve other congregations and organizations to participate in family support seeking preventive care instead of waiting for the next crisis.
- Develop a relationship between CCSS and the BPD to address families in need.
- Break down barriers that have existed between the named groups and the community.
- Be interactive in community support to keep families from falling into a pattern of criminal behavior, keep children in school, and provide means for a family to develop financial stability.

### **With the holiday season here, here are a few tips to keep it safe, particularly while out shopping:**

- Park in well-lit spaces and as close to store as possible.
- Lock all car doors and hide all packages in trunk.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash.
- Make sure you are not encumbered with a large number of packages. Make trips back to car to stow them in the trunk as you continue to shop.
- Carry your purse as close to your body as possible; no dangling straps.
- Carry your wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket.
- Do not shop alone. Coordinate shopping trips with your friends.
- Teach your children who to go to in case you become separated in a store, such as a store clerk or security guard.

### **And these are a few safety tips for businesses:**

- Ensure an uncluttered and well-lit view from the outside.
- Ensure staff has an unobstructed view of customers and they should know proper procedures if they spot a shoplifter.
- Train staff to recognize counterfeit currency, credit cards, and false ID's.
- Excess cash should be transferred from register regularly.
- Cash registers should be emptied every night.
- The money in the registers should be counted in a secure area out of view of customers and passers-by.
- Surveillance cameras should be serviced and maintained regularly.

On a final note, please enjoy the holidays with your family or loved ones. They are special and will always be there to support you in a time of need.